CAPÍTULO III

The Bus Trip: children's literature and the roadmap for emancipation

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Introduction

This study follows a line of research that we have already pursued in other published works (Balça & Costa, 2015; Balça, Azevedo & Selfa, 2017, 2018), focused on Portuguese children's literature, written and published from the mid-1970s to the present day.

For some years now, we have been focusing our research on political and citizenship issues in children's literature, not only because there have always been literary texts for children that have addressed, or been shaped around, these themes, but also because, in today's world, societies and countries have been facing growing challenges which are naturally reflected in the world of childhood and children's literature.

Today, authors, illustrators and publishers continue to publish old and new literary texts for children, which somehow carry a political message. In the countries that make up the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain), the establishment of democratic regimes, in the 1970s, allowed children's literature to be opened to themes previously considered inappropriate for children, which were, therefore, censored. We can mention, by way of example, themes such as the Colonial War in African countries under Portuguese rule, the Spanish Civil War or others such as

racism, gender discrimination or homosexuality. Although books for younger audiences may currently be influenced by covert forms of censorship (Machado, 2015), it is undeniable that children's literature writers, illustrators and publishers are heralds of the problems that affect contemporary societies, proposing forms of resistance and emancipation strategies in their works.

In this study we will focus on works by authors/illustrators, published in recent years, and coming from different contexts at the global level, addressing the contribution of children's literature to the social and civic education of young people. Children's books are culturally rich and complex objects. Their reading usually encompasses two different types of text: writing and illustration. By linking these two types of text, children's literature encompasses a set of themes, messages and values that are shared with young readers by reading mediators. Text and illustration combine to communicate, share, urge, warn of the most diverse problems and point to a wide variety of solutions.

In this context, these books, in addition to performing both an aesthetic and a playful function, share with young readers a clearly formative and emancipatory function. It is along these lines that, in this study, we propose to approach two children's books: Last Stop on Market Street (2015), by American authors Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson and Rosa Parks' Bus (2011), signed by Italian authors Fabrizio Silei and Maurizio Quarello.

The objectives of this study are to introduce two contemporary children's books, written on two different continents (America and Europe), but whose narrative contents are similar; to understand what values and messages are being shared with young readers; to understand the importance of these books for the civic education of children.

Our hermeneutic analysis will focus on the books' texts and illustrations, with the aim of interpreting the themes, messages and values they contain.

Thus, in this article, in addition to this introduction and a brief discussion of the potential of children's literature for individual transformation, we intend to offer a critical and reflective reading of the aforementioned books, highlighting their contribution to the construction, in young readers, of a free and critical spirit that enables a journey towards emancipation. Lastly, we will make some final remarks and present our bibliographical references.

Children's literature, the path to emancipation

The human being acts in society imbued with a set of principles and values and, according to Patrício (1993), education is only intelligible with an axiological reference. And, therefore, Patrício (1991) introduces six categories that combine values, from which we highlight both ethical and aesthetic values.

Ethical values encompass politics, law, and morality. Democracy, freedom and autonomy are, for this researcher, the pillars of civic education. However, freedom should not be confused with autonomy; Autonomy is deeper, more radical than freedom. Freedom is the power to choose within an established legality. Autonomy is the power to establish one's own legality. So, we can say that autonomy is the freedom of freedom (Patrício, 1991, p. 212).

Over the years, though different regimes around the world have, at different times, established harsh dictatorships supported by fierce censorship, children's book authors have always found a way to create forms of resistance and to share their political and civic messages through their books (Balça, Azevedo & Selfa, 2017, 2018). Freedom and autonomy characterise multiple verbal and visual discourses, in works that come across as subversive, addressing issues that are inconvenient for the established powers.

For Patrício (1991), aesthetic values are of enormous educational importance, and aesthetic education "should aim to prepare the student for the human aesthetic experience in its entirety. It should therefore include a component focused on fruition, another one on creation, and a third on reflection" (Patrício, 1991, p. 150).

According to Peñafiel (2013), when we talk about art, such as literature or theatre, its intention is to provoke readers/viewers; its intention is to instigate their critical spirit, or even to provoke an indignation that may mobilise the construction of change. Aesthetic values, "the elements with which language is created for the purpose of communicating meaning, related to the political sphere, can be an interesting way of reading" (Peñafiel, 2013, p. 2). In other words, aesthetic creation, beyond fruition, implies reflection; it implies the attitude of individuals towards taking on the different areas of life in society, positioning themselves in relation to various problems.

In today's democratic regimes, discourse (and aesthetic discourse) is facing subliminal censorship, in its many guises. As Machado (2015) tells us, the key aspect of censorship is "the arbitrariness of a personal decision taken based on an unquestionable power that falls on a defenceless victim" (Machado, 2015, p. 16). And nowadays, this censorship is directly related to the power of certain lobbies

and of economic power, from an asymmetric logic that favours the instituted powers established in society.

The publishing of children's books is no exception to this rule and they are censored because "publishers often hesitate when it comes to publishing something that might seem unpleasant to someone" or because there is a "concern to avoid any possibility of offending exaggerated sensitivities that might pose some risk to their sales and profits" (Machado, 2015, p. 16-17).

In fact, Cerrillo (2014) tells us about two types of censorship: direct censorship is an express prohibition of certain books for different reasons; on the other hand, covert censorship is not exactly the result of a prohibition, but rather the result of omissions, concealment or deliberate forgetfulness. Also according to this researcher, censorship can take quite sophisticated forms, such as relegating certain books to inaccessible library shelves. And Cerrillo (2014) does not shy away from stating that "In the 20th century, the arbitrariness and impertinence of all censorship has also affected children's and young adult literature" (Cerrillo, 2014, p. 10). Censorship in children's literature relates to its obvious connection to education. Cândido (2004) says that "in our societies, literature has been a powerful instrument of instruction and education, entering the curricula, being proposed individually as a piece of intellectual and emotional equipment" (Cândido, 2004, p. 175).

Therefore, censorship in children's literature can take a multitude of forms. On the one hand, the current regimes may view certain themes and/or uses of language as unsuitable for children and, for this very reason, they are not addressed in children's books - issues such as war or homosexuality. There is clearly an attempt to protect children by not allowing them to come across information that may be relevant to their all-round individual development. By way of example, we mention the book by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, illustrated by Henry Cole ⁶⁷ (And Tango Makes Three, which is on the top ten list of the most commonly challenged books in the States, United gathered bγ the American Library Association https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-and-tango-makes-three/).

On the other hand, it is often via the educational system, but also via the cultural and editorial systems, and via children's literature, that the current regimes often approach the newest elements that assert their ideology, conveying ideas and/or events that are often false. We usually find these manipulations of facts in many books aimed at discussing History for young readers. According to Azevedo (2011), children's literature has an emancipating potential, because it questions practices, suggests alternatives, and stimulates critical reflection on multiple realities.

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⁶⁷ The book And Tango Makes Three has been published in Spain and Portugal, by Editora Kalandraka, and is one of the books recommended for reading with children in the Portuguese National Reading Plan.

Children's books are voices of resistance, often the voices of large majorities oppressed by small hegemonic minorities. In the struggle for power, these dominant minorities are too often favoured; majorities are also all too often left with the space and time of resistance, in an unrelenting pursuit of forms of emancipation.

Cândido (2004) considers literature as "incompressible assets, that is, those that cannot be denied to anyone." (Cândido, 2004, p. 173). According to this researcher, literature has a humanising force; it is "a conscious instrument for unmasking" (Cândido, 2004, p. 186) the trampling of human rights.

Literature has the capacity to transform individuals and this change in people contributes to changing the world itself (Cerrillo, 2014). And children's literature really reflects the society in which it is produced, giving voice to Patrício (1996) when he asserts the axiological neutrality of discourse as a fallacy or an impossibility, or as Peter Hollindale (1988) says, "a large part of any book is written not by its author, but by the world its author lives in" (p. 23).

Critical analysis of the narrative albums

In this study we propose to carry out a critical and reflexive analysis of two works, whose multiple possible readings undoubtedly lead us to voices of resistance and forms of emancipation: Last Stop on Market Street (2015), by American authors Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson and Rosa Parks' Bus (2011), signed by Italian authors Fabrizio Silei and Maurizio Quarello.

The bus and travel as a metaphor are key elements of both works. When we look at travel as a metaphor, we must first try to understand its double perspective as an imaginary, intellectual journey and as physical displacement in space and time. These two aspects should be regarded as complementary. If, on the one hand, we have travel as something real, as a physical displacement in space, it also corresponds to a journey with a symbolic, inner nature, to the knowledge of oneself. Savater (1976) explains that a number of initiation rites often take place on a trip, an aspect that is masterfully shown in these works. However, in these works, the trip is made by bus, a means of public transportation, which can transport a large number of people. In fact, in these works, the bus becomes a symbol of this journey that should be everyone's, which leads us to discovery, to knowledge of reality and to a struggle that enables change and the construction of a fairer society.

Indeed, in both Last Stop on Market Street (De La Peña & Robinson, 2015) and Rosa Parks' Bus (Silei & Quarello, 2011), there are transformations which are decisive for the characters and, therefore, for changing the cognitive environments of those

who read them. And it is thanks to the experience of accompanying the trip made by young CJ and his grandmother that the reader realises that wealth and happiness are not gained from materials goods, but rather from sharing and healthy interactions with others. It is also by discovering and learning more about Rosa Parks' bus that the reader becomes aware of the nightmare that was racial segregation in the United States until the end of the 1960s and of the non-violent struggle for resistance waged by a fragile woman at the time. Both works are narrative albums, where there is a clear coordination between the visual text and the verbal text, and there are times when the visual text significantly expands or suggests what is verbally expressed.

Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson, Last Stop on Market Street (2015)

The book Last Stop on Market Street was published in Portugal in 2015, by Editora Minotauro. It has been distinguished with several international awards, such as the New York Times Book Review Notable Children's Book of 2015, the Wall Street Journal Best Children's Book of 2015, the 2016 Newbery Medal or the 2016 Coretta Scott King Honour Book for the illustrator; both the writer and the illustrator are American.

Matt de la Peña lives in Brooklyn, New York and has a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing from San Diego State University. Of Mexican origin, Matt de la Peña wrote a book for young adults called *Mexican WhiteBoy*, which was banned from classrooms in Tucson, Arizona. In his own words, in an interview with Michael Winerip for *The New York Times*, we find the causes he stands for in his works for both young adults and children. "He explained that, half-Mexican, half-white, he had grown up speaking no Spanish; too white for Mexican kids, too brown for whites." (Winerip, 2012). Reflecting American society, Matt de la Peña draws attention to the Other, to the growth that leads to resistance and emancipation, in a society with both subliminal and real, effective forms of censorship, and where a large part of the population, notably Hispanics or African Americans, do not enjoy equal opportunity.

Christian Robinson lives in Northern California and studied animation at The California Institute of the Arts. He is an award-winning illustrator who has received, among others, the Caldecott Honour, the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honour or the Newbery Medal. Christian Robinson has also worked with the Sesame Street Workshop and Pixar Animation Studios. Talented, mastering various illustration techniques, Christian Robinson says "I love working in collage. Last Stop on Market Street was produced using a mix of paint and collage." (Brightly Editors, 2019, s/p). Raised by his extended family, and undeniably living in very difficult conditions, as "He grew up in a small one bedroom apartment with his brother, two cousins, aunt, and grandmother." (Simon & Schuster, 2019, s/p), for him, drawing became a form

of emancipation, giving him the possibility of imagining and creating the world he wished to see.

Somehow, the duo Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson, who published *Carmela Full of Wishes* in 2018, found in art, the art of words and visual art, a way to contribute to the construction of change, to foster critical thinking and awareness of the problems, injustices, and arbitrariness that rule the world among the younger audiences. So, for these two artists, art is a form of emancipation, an incompressible asset, necessary for their way of being present in society.

In Last Stop on Market Street (de la Peña & Robinson, 2015), the front and back covers are a unit of meaning. The front cover, which continues the back cover and the visual metaphor of the trip, shows, in addition to the highlighted title, the writer's and the illustrator's names, peritextual references to two awards. The front cover shows, in a close-up and seen from behind, both the grandmother and grandson, waiting for the bus that will take them to their destination, a bus driven by a black driver and inside of which there are several people from different age groups.

The endpapers show a series of elements repeated on a yellow background. These elements (a bus, a butterfly, a coin, a jar with butterflies, a guitar, a bird, a pair of glasses, a tree with leaves, a sitting dog, a rainbow, an umbrella and a lady's hat with flowers) refer to isotopes that will be dominant throughout the book, enabling, in a pre-reading moment, the activation of a certain horizon of expectations and, in a post-reading moment, the identification of the key elements of the book: travelling, life, music, freedom and happiness. This yellow background establishes a chromatic dialogue with the clothes worn by the child, CJ, the protagonist of the story.

The narrative begins with CJ, a black boy, and his grandmother, also black, leaving a church, in a city, and waiting for the bus to arrive. The scenery shows an urban street with its multi-coloured houses, trees, the street, residents, pedestrians, cars circulating.

Basically, the daily life of any city. In this context, the child asks his grandmother questions, and it is she who, with her answers, explains the world to CJ. This explanation, made with wisdom and experience, will help CJ and the reader envisions a society where not everyone has the same material goods and, therefore, can own the same objects. The work praises the simplicity and the essentials of life, which is living happily with what you have, always looking for the positive side of situations and experiencing sharing. Happiness is not connected to the ownership of material objects (a car, a bicycle, an mp3 player), but to the way the world is read and lived. Greeting other people who share the same space, getting to know them,

calling them by their names, establishing relationships based on kindness, friendship and respect with them is much more relevant than owning material goods. True wealth lies in sharing and interacting with others. So, the bus represents a sort of Garden of Eden, a space for sharing and happiness. When, at certain times, the child expresses sadness when he realises that he is unable to have the same objects as other children, his grandmother, with the wisdom that comes with age, deconstructs the situation, showing him that he is much wealthier than those other children.

The bus is also a place where CJ can listen to live music, feel it, enjoy it. Music represents, in this text, a moment of narrative climax. Music is, in fact, synonymous with a space of freedom, of escape, of colour, of magic, of return to nature and to the harmony of ecosystems, in short, a vehicle for accessing wonder:

[...] And, in the dark, the rhythm carried CJ to other places, far away from the bustling city. He saw sunset colours swirling over crashing waves. He saw a family of hawks slicing through the sky. He saw the old lady's butterflies dancing free in the light of the moon. CJ felt his chest fill with air and let himself be carried away by the magic of the music (de la Peña & Robinson, 2015, s/p).

The trip ends at the last stop, on Market Street. The urban landscape has changed. The reader realises that the surrounding environment is now characterised by rundown streets, pitted sidewalks, broken doors, windows covered with graffiti, closed shops and, in this scenario, the grandmother tells her grandson to look at the sky: "- Sometimes when you're surrounded by dirt, CJ, you're a better witness for what's beautiful" (de la Peña & Robinson, 2015, s/p).

The sky, with its rainbow, a symbol of the connection between the sky and the earth, is a gift for all those who, like little CJ and his grandmother, visit the Soup Kitchen. It is in this place, topologically removed from the central and rich part of the city, that people recognise familiar faces and that the happiness of sharing (human interactions and food) becomes a reality. The multicoloured rainbow is a precious metaphor for reading this album: the most important determinant to human happiness is not material goods, but the way we read the world and interact with it. And this is the wisdom of life that the grandmother shares with her grandson, CJ.

The album ends with grandson and grandmother at the bus stop, waiting for the bus that will take them home, certainly on a collective journey, a physical journey and a much richer inner journey.

Fabrizio Silei and Maurizio Quarello, Rosa Parks' Bus (2011)

The book *Rosa Parks'* Bus was published in Portugal in 2011, by Dinalivro. Distinguished with several international awards, such as the 2012 *Llibreter Award*, chosen for the 2012 *White Raven Award*, this book, whose author and illustrator are Italian, has been translated in many countries, such as Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Greece, Brazil, South Korea or the USA.

Fabrizio Silei was born in Florence and has a degree in Political Sciences, having worked as a sociologist. He is also a well-established visual artist, with a degree from the College of Arts. Fabrizio Silei has won several major awards, not only as a writer (Hans Christian Andersen Prize, 2014) but also as a visual artist (Stepan Zavrel International Illustration Prize, 2007). He is a versatile artist, committed to society, and he describes himself as "a researcher of stories and human events" (Silei, 2019, s/p); his novel Alice ei Nibelunghi (2008) chosen as a finalist for the Unicef Award for Literature of Human and Children Rights.

Maurizio Quarello was born in Turin and studied graphic design, architecture, and illustration. He teaches illustration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Macerata (Italy) and organises illustration courses for children and adults. He also worked for clients as diverse as Lufthansa, the Wall Street Journal or Bilan. He is an award-winning illustrator who has received, among others, the Hans Christian Andersen Award for best Italian illustrator (2012), and his work has been published in various countries, such as Spain, France, Switzerland or the USA (Quarello, 2019, s/p).

Rosa Parks' Bus (Silei & Quarello, 2011) is a fictional recreation of the life of a significant figure in the history of the United States: Rosa Louise McCauley, better known as Rosa Parks, and her struggle against racial segregation in the 1950s. This work, with well-crafted images that evoke the contemporary American painter Edward Hopper, recreates the episode that took place on 1 December, 1955, involving Rosa Parks, an African-American seamstress who lived in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks boarded a bus on Cleveland Avenue and, at a certain point during her trip, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger who wanted to sit down just because he was white.

Rosa Parks was arrested and subsequently supported in her struggle by the African-American community, who stopped riding the bus. This legal fight was led by Martin Luther King. After 14 months of legal battle, the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in transport was unconstitutional. Rosa Parks, who died in 2005, has become a symbol of the civil rights movement.

The importance and symbolism of this episode made it famous around the world and was interestingly recreated by these Italian artists. Rosa Parks' Bus is, therefore, a work that enlightens the readers about the recent past and points to the notion

that they need to defend their rights and fight for a just, inclusive and democratic society.

The front and back covers are a unit of meaning. In them we see the famous bus and an African-American lady preparing to get on it. On the top of the A4 cover, we find the names of the authors and the title of the work, centred; the publisher's logo is on the bottom, centred, and, in the right corner, we find the Amnesty International logo, with the name Portugal. The presence of this logo, linked to an important human rights organisation, fits the work within a concrete ideological perspective. This logo, clearly visible on the book cover, also helps potential readers to know where they stand: this is a work recommended by a human rights organisation, so we certainly have in front of us a book whose theme focuses on an appeal to ethical values.

The back cover, in addition to showing the back of the bus, where we see a few seated passengers, includes a short verbal text, which will also appear in the narrative, and explicitly calls upon readers to take action: "In each of our lives, there will always be a bus running. Keep your eyes open and don't miss yours." (Silei & Quarello, 2011, back cover). This somewhat cryptic phrase draws the attention of potential readers to the notion that travel is a metaphor for life, materialised in the bus and the right opportunity, at the right time, to catch it.

The endpapers have a yellow background, repeating the colour of the bus shown on the cover. Regardless of the colour of the bus, the colour chosen for the endpapers can reveal to the potential reader a book whose message will refer to life, to energy, to light, all symbolisms associated with yellow.

The frontispiece is dominated by a close-up drawing, with the shadow of the bus stop sign projecting onto the following page. The bus stop at which Rosa Parks got in, the bus stops at which several passengers got on, the bus stop at which the bus driver placed the *coloured* sign behind the row where Rosa Parks was sitting, triggering the episode recreated in this work. The (bus) stop can also be a metaphor for this episode: stop to racial discrimination, stop to think and stop to act on the way we want to lead our lives and, through them, build a changing world.

The narrative begins with a grandfather taking his grandson to see an object on display at the Henry Ford Museum, Rosa Parks' bus, and there he shares with him the story of the young seamstress' non-violent resistance to the laws of racial segregation in force in her country, but also her life story. The grandson learns about the struggle to resist racial segregation, its anonymous heroes, those who had the strength and courage to fight and those who couldn't do it. However, the grandson learns that "the most important thing is to overcome fear and always be on the side of what is fair" (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p).

From a chromatic point of view, the work is divided into two diegetic moments: the present and the past. The present is depicted using coloured tones, while the past, the time when there were unfair racial segregation laws, is shown to the readers in black and white tones, with close-up drawings, allowing them to get a good look at the environment and examine parts of Rosa Parks' face in detail. The choice of colours, as well as the option to use close-up drawings, which allow the emotions of the protagonists to be seen in detail throughout the story (those who preceded Rosa Parks and Rosa Parks herself), are elements that are imposed on the readers and encourage them to reflect on this greatly significant historical event for the present.

The book includes historical references to the atmosphere of fear and tension that characterised this period, leading the reader to experience the emotional climate of the time. Indeed, there are references to "a white hood with two holes for the eyes" (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p), a clear reference to the violent white supremacy movement Ku Klux Klan which, in fact, has an iconic presence on the double page that shows the beating of Jeremy, the baggage handler, whose glass eye and wooden leg had "become a warning" (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p): a depiction of the fear that had taken over the African American community.

The book ends with picture that evokes Edward Hopper's work: grandfather and grandson sitting at a table in a pastry shop, the grandson eating ice cream and the grandfather reading a newspaper, "which had a photograph of a man on the front page" (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p), whose "skin was as dark" (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p) as the narrator's. This scene takes place in a peaceful and serene atmosphere, with different people sharing the same space, and a bright sign outside, where we can read, in large letters, the word "Hope". It is, in fact, in the younger generation, in those with the same age as the grandson, that lies the hope for a more tolerant and inclusive world, a world where everyone can live their lives in respect and harmony, without fear, discrimination or intolerance. But these healthy interactions with others imply sharing memories and experiences between generations, helping younger people not to be afraid and to fight for what they believe in.

This final scene, the narrative climax, brings together the stories told in the two diegetic planes (the present and the past), as well as the fulfilment of the mission of each of those journeys. Barack Obama, the then president of the United States of America, a black African-American, is shown as the ultimate exponent of the path towards the end of racial segregation; on the other hand, when the grandfather passes on this historical legacy to his grandson, it becomes a testimonial that, despite the need to be conveyed, reveals a deep and bitter feeling of guilt. The grandfather apologises to his grandson for not having had Rosa Parks' courage, for not having been the protagonist of History, and it is at this moment, very

emotionally charged, that there is a call for individual awareness of the importance of not missing the bus: "in each of our lives, there will always be a bus running. (...) keep your eyes open and don't miss yours." (Silei & Quarello, 2011, s/p). Emotionally recalling Rosa Parks' journey is therefore a means for learning history, learning about its protagonists, and learning from them, daring to challenge fears and fight for what one believes in.

Final Remarks

The objectives of this study were to introduce two contemporary children's books, written on two different continents, but whose narrative contents are similar; to understand what values and messages were being shared with young readers; and to understand the importance of these books for the civic education of children. Thus, we reflected on how children's books can become rich and complex artistic objects that help young readers read the world. Children's literature is not innocuous and can carry a political message, becoming a powerful subversive instrument associated with resistance. Due to its power to change the world and to educate younger audiences, children's literature is no exception to the rule and is also subject to censorship, even in the 21st century, in different countries around world, even those traditionally vaunted as bastions of democracy and the defence of human rights.

The works under analysis contain an axiological reference that is in no way negligible. In fact, they contain a set of values, which lied at the origin of European humanist thought, which can help us build a democratic, free, inclusive, and increasingly participatory society. Both works feature children as protagonists, accompanied by an adult with educational responsibilities: the grandmother in one case and the grandfather in the other. They are tutelary figures, older, even in their worldly wisdom, and here they replace the parents as the most likely guardians, as they are currently perceived as being too busy to tell stories, to accompany, to educate, to live.

In both works, the elderly are the ones who share with the children a series of considerations that help them to read the world, to understand it in its complexity, to learn how to resist the dominant culture (materialism, in the case of *Last Stop on Market Street*) or how to fight, without fear, for what is fair (*Rosa Parks' Bus*).

Art becomes a roadmap for emancipation and, according to Fritzen (2019), "perhaps it is also our responsibility to defend, in the new configuration of forces in which we are immersed, not the right to literature, but the duties it imposes on us (Fritzen, 2019, p. 88). In this context, both works explicitly call for an emancipation of the Other, conveying values relevant to citizenship education.

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